

Dr. Todd G. Bonsall – Principal
Cumberland County Technical Education Center
601 Bridgeton Avenue
Bridgeton, NJ 08302
856-451-9000 x228

High School Redesign Could Stall NJ's Economic Engine

If the State Board of Education adopts the current High School Redesign proposal, shared-time career and technical education, as we know it, will cease to exist in New Jersey and more than 7,500 NJ students could be unprepared to compete for high-skill, high wage jobs.

This concern is as real as it gets—and, I'm here to explain why.

I'm Dr. Todd Bonsall, Principal of Cumberland County Technical Education Center, a shared-time career and technical high school.

Students in shared-time technical programs split their day between their technical school and their home district. We teach career and technical programs while home districts provide academic courses. Three counties (Cumberland, Mercer and Hunterdon) exclusively offer only shared-time programs.

High School Redesign proposes to make advanced academic courses, like Algebra II and Chemistry, mandatory graduation requirements attached to a high stakes test. There are many different opinions that students need Algebra II. We, in Career and Technical Education, agree with Professor Rosenstein from Rutgers University that Algebra II, as a terminal course, is not germane to CTE curriculums. What we need most is an Applied Technical Algebra instead of Algebra II. **The proposal's intent is to ensure that our state's workforce remains competitive in a global economy. Ironically, adding advanced academic program requirements would actually decrease worker competency since less time would be available for technical skill training.**

Employers are looking for graduates who have the skills and experience their business needs to make money. Real-world job skills, including practical math and science knowledge, is what drives our economy. Requiring every high school graduate to master higher level math and science concepts has statewide financial and economic development implications. According to the Department of Labor, 65%, nearly two-thirds, of all available jobs require technical training—while only 20% require four-year college degree.

One of the biggest impacts of the proposed High School Re-design is financial. Instead of receiving the career training at no charge through public high school programs, post secondary students would incur thousands of dollars of additional costs to receive their career training.

Another major stumbling block for shared-time technical programs is that the high school students' day is *finite*. Requiring additional academic courses will prevent high school students from attending shared-time schools because... *they just don't have the time*. Requiring additional academic courses will **squeeze shared-time students' schedules to the breaking point.**

Current shared-time students must successfully complete the majority of their graduation requirements in the 9th and 10th grade prior to enrolling in shared-time programs. The recent addition of increased graduation requirements is already taking a toll on shared-time career and technical programs. CCTEC's shared-time enrollment is down 111 students this year and Mercer County Tech experienced a similar decline.

Once high school students enroll in our programs, **there's no guarantee they will be able to stay.** HSPA or class failures mean they are held back at their sending district for remediation. And yet, many of these students often have no immediate plans for college and would benefit most from our programs.

Additional academic requirements will also affect shared-time technical students' ability to earn critical industry-based certifications. Industry certifications matter. Let's not forget, shared-time high school students must not only pass the HSPA—but industry-based assessments too. Less technical training time means less industry certifications. Students' achievement on industry certification tests is as important as their performance on high-stakes academic tests.

If we want our NJ's high school graduates to be able to compete in the new global economy, they must be skilled and job-ready. Our shared-time career and technical programs need to remain accessible to high school students. The proposed High School Redesign may cause our students to miss the opportunity of their lifetime—**receiving a free, public education in a shared-time career and technical school!**

I encourage the State Board of Education to steer education requirements in the right direction and ensure access to our state's career and technical shared-time programs.